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An evaluation of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and its influence in its 20 years of existence reveals discrepancies in prestige. The study represents a compilation of data collected from 100 individuals directly involved in or affected by SREB's work. Through SREB identification of educational needs and suggestions on how they might be met, the South's first campaign to popularize higher education was initiated. By focusing on content and practice, the campaign helped legislators to recognize the necessity for allocating funds for quality education. Another innovation was to help develop and operate student contract programs, in which students could cross state lines for professional and specialized education and thus prevent costly expansion of existing institutions in each state for advanced study in specialized areas. Increased population and knowledge, however, made campus growth inevitable. Governors who served on the Board later demanded federal support for the improvement of graduate research programs. SREB conferences, studies, proposals, publications and participation in educational decision making have helped to establish 50 new institutions and expand many others in scope and capacity. These achievements have gained stature for SREB among state government officials, a limited group of university presidents, deans and directors, national private foundations and college and university associations. But prestige drops sharply within the academic community where SREB accomplishments are unknown. (WM)

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MPACT OF THE OUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD N ITS FIRST TWENTY YEARS

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would indeed be a departure from American folkways to examine conditions and prospects, as has been done in this volume, nd then fail to seek instruments to deal constructively with roblems and opportunities discovered. Americans are confirmed nstrumenters. One possible instrument is the Southern Regional ducation Board, which has existed amidst analogous conditions nd prospects for 20 years. Has its lively, activity-filled exstence had influence upon the course of events—and especially ducation-connected developments—over those two decades? If o, perhaps it is one instrument with potential utility for the uture.

This is a report upon the results of a critical inquiry into impacts made by SREB upon the course of educational events between 1948 and 1968. The conclusions presented are obviously ubjective judgments, attributions and deductions. They are contributed to by compilations and accounts prepared by others and y opinions and remembrances shared with the author by some 00 observers. But they are outcomes by interpretation, not findngs from empirical investigation. The end in view is not to valuate the accomplishments of SREB, but to examine, as objectively as possible, the hypothesis that SREB has influenced levelopments occurring in higher education.

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Recognition as an Influencer

To be deemed influential is not always tantamount to being influential, of course. But recognition is certainly one indicator of performance. Denomination of SREB as "influential" or "effective" is impressively widespread. This is not to say it is recognized by the man on the street or that it enjoys high visibility on the typical college campus.

But a reputation for influence is found strikingly among governors and former governors of the Southern states.

State legislators in significant numbers designate SREB, from their experience, as an important factor in decisions they have reached.

Some two dozen presidents and former presidents of universities in the South wrote the author witnesses of influential stature for SREB.

The appearance of SREB as an agency to be represented, or to be consulted, on lists maintained by a wide variety of federal government agencies is another testimony to a reputation for being influential.

Certainly, SREB seems to enjoy considerable prestige in the circles of national private foundations, as well as of national associations of colleges and universities.

The reputation for being influential, however, is not equally distributed among the communities of observers. It appears comparatively strong among officials of state government and among those who are devoted to specialized endeavors—such as the health sciences—on the national scene. It is significant among a restricted number of university top-management officials—presidents, deans and directors. It drops sharply as the institutional campus is entered, and seems to have little significance in the private sector of the higher education community.

Influence Upon Governmental Climate

Convincing evidence exists that the governmental climate for higher education in the Southern states is significantly more conducive to high quality attainments in 1968 than it was in 1948. The existence and activities of SREB may account for some of this difference. In fact, the author is convinced they do, and some of the reasons for that conviction will be set forth.

First, however, it is necessary to express two *caveats* about the rhetoric employed in the remainder of this presentation. Our focus is upon SREB, and hence a surface impression of attributing to that agency full credit for the outcomes cited is bound to result. That impression, if left, is false. Also, we are dealing with impacts made, not with impacts attempted but not made. The total story of SREB is without doubt a mixture of successes and disappointments; we place the emphasis on some of the success components of that mixture. Now we can return to SREB's part in changing for the better the governmental climate for higher education in the Southern states.

Governors who have served on the Southern Regional Education Board are almost unanimous in extolling the personal benefits accruing from their association with SREB endeavors. Apparently, the existence of SREB had much to do with the prominence accorded to education in deliberations of the Southern Governors' Conference—a rather striking prominence to one who reviews the proceedings of meetings of that conference and the activities undertaken by it.

State legislators are somewhat less positive than governors in their assessment of the values of SREB-sponsored conclaves for them, but a considerable volume of highly commendatory appraisals came from the majority of states.

Educators are much more explicit in their judgments. They say it was in setting the stage for edifying the horizon-lifting experiences by governors and state legislators that SREB's greatest contribution has been made. Their reference is not so much to specific undertakings as it is to the personal postures, commitments and understandings developed by key leaders in state government—in other words, to climate.

Through SREB as an agency, the South's first concerted campaign on behalf of higher education was launched. To the forces existent within each state, forces necessarily of semipartisan and seemingly self-serving character exerted primarily by institutions, was added the voice of a nonpartisan combine. That combine was indigenous, of and for the South. Through a variety of media this agency spoke for the importance of higher education to any state; it identified needs and suggested strongly those needs could be met. It enlisted widespread participation in facing facts and drawing conclusions.

From such endeavors a constant stream of attention-arousing communications flowed into the public domain. Government found increasing public readiness for enhanced efforts to provide higher education, and those officials who proffered leadership in these directions found encouraging popular support. The educational renaissance at work in the South in 1948 probably made it inevitable that higher education would eventually receive requisite governmental attention, but it is quite likely the impact of SREB shortened the waiting span by several years. While SREB's service in climate-improvement was most striking during its first decade of existence, the reception accorded to *Within Our Reach* in recent years is one of several evidences that this service is still significant.

Perhaps the most impressive change in Southern governmental *ethos* respecting higher education has occurred in the realm of defining what constitutes the necessary quality of performance. In effect, most Southern states have exchanged a provincial set of reference points for universally determined norms; they have discovered and accepted more exacting definitions of "the good."

In this area, SREB seems to have rendered a unique service. While it may have added little to the forces already at work upon educators, its influence upon the makers of laws and appropriations and upon the chief executives in state government has been—according to the testimony of these people themselves—unmistakable. This is not to say at all that SREB has been the chief influence at work to fill the concept of quality in higher education with elevated meanings for the occupants of statehouses. It is to opine, however, that SREB's impact has been significant and unique in enriching the quality ingredient of the governmental climate for higher education.

Resource Conservation and Cultivation

Since its inception, the Southern Regional Education Board has served as a developing and operating agent for student contract programs. Through these contracts, students have been enabled to move across state lines to secure professional and specialized education, and 21 institutions (public and private) have been used as resources by states not operating them. In 1967-68,

for example, some 1,400 contract students were enrolled in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, social work, actuarial science, meteorology, forestry and several other specialties.

Originators of the contract program had four hopes for its impact. It should serve, they reasoned, to make it unnecessary for some states to enter or expand their involvement in costly fields of professional education such as medicine and dentistry. This hope was realized for a time, but only temporarily. The originators also hoped it would be possible to serve the entire Southern region with a small number of highly specialized offerings in small-demand fields. This worked satisfactorily, but the demand on the part of the states grew, as a result of population and knowledge increases, and made expansion necessary. A third hope was that the institutions opened to contract payments would be able to maintain or build distinguished quality not achievable with existing financial support. This end was achieved in several fields, such as veterinary medicine, medicine and dentistry. This program made it possible for Meharry Medical College to stay in service when otherwise it likely would have had to close. Although it still has not attained secure status, Meharry remains in service today. While other receiving institutions were able to move forward, it is difficult to establish connection between the contract arrangement and such moves—although there are cases where the improvement of facilities and staff are resulting in superior professional programs. The fourth, and perhaps greatest, original hope was that Southern young people would be advantaged by advanced education made available through contract arrangements. This hope appears to have been fulfilled in dramatic degree. The fact that patronage of the contract program has not declined in the face of greatly expanded in-state provisions for professional and advanced graduate education testifies to continued viability of the student-serving hope.

At a later stage in history, SREB caused to be explored in considerable depth a conservation-and-development strategy called "Centers of Excellence." The basic idea was that existing institutions would be given mandates and special promotional help to develop peaks of eminence in selected fields. These centers would have, at least for a time, a "gentleman's agreement" monopoly upon the upper reaches in the specialty, and in return

would agree to serve an interstate clientele. Exploration of the feasibility of this strategy turned into an educational Donnybrook, and "Centers of Excellence" died—far from peacefully. But the exploration which preceded demise may have been SREB's greatest single cultivation of resources for graduate education in the South.

For one thing, it gave scores of influential and strategically based educators their first real cutting knowledge of the differences between graduate-caliber advanced education and graduate degree-producing course offerings. These educators, in turn, apparently did a pretty good job of interesting governors and legislators in what distinguished a graduate center of excellence from a garden variety of post-baccalaureate endeavor. Third, the notion of the inescapable tie between research and advanced graduate education received a widespread going-over. Fourth, and in a different vein, the heat generated in private and public higher education circles by what many individuals perceived as an inappropriate invasion of academic sanctity by an "outside" agency—namely, SREB—caused that agency to work out much closer ties with the higher education establishment in subsequent program planning. Thus, we have an example of how to succeed in business by apparently failing.

Development and exploitation of the research potential of Southern universities has been rather striking over the past decade. Efforts and influences producing these results have emanated from multiple sources. One of those sources has certainly been SREB. Its publications and public communications are cited by several observers as adding to the rising tide of research-seeking by Southern interests. Conferences and study groups convened by SREB are remembered by others as significant nudges. The liaison office maintained in Washington by SREB for a time is recalled by a few.

Often expressed is a conviction of governors and university presidents that the "education" governors received through serving on the Board had much to do with mounting insistence through political and governmental channels that the South receive a fairer share of the federal research-support allocations. And, of course, SREB itself has been no sluggard in securing and using research and development dollars for the improve-

ment of professional and graduate programs in the region. The resources for research present in the states and institutions of the Southern region have emerged from insignificance into significance. SREB should receive some credit for that emergence.

Resources for higher education consist predominantly of faculty competence, of program capacities, and of student capabilities and dispositions. Evidence of accretions to such resources in the South is found strikingly in the recent emergence into visibility of advanced specialized areas of training and investigation. Agricultural sciences, mental health personnel, educational television, education of the handicapped, computer science, marine biology, statistics, aerospace engineering and urban geology are examples of an impressive array of specialties in which institutions or combinations of institutions in the South are winning distinction. Distinction comes because of faculty, because of program effectiveness, because of performance by student products.

The fact that SREB has carried on regional development and promotion programs in several of these areas does not prove it has influenced the achievements made. It could be following the fact rather than making it, riding the latest favorite in the continuous academic horse race. But when this reporter consulted educators closely involved with some of these emerging fields of distinction, they gave SREB an appreciable, notable role as an influencer of what has transpired.

One hopes a comparable development of faculty, program capacity and student performance has occurred in the realm of undergraduate education and especially in its foundational core of basic studies. This is difficult to demonstrate, although a few indirect indicators are positive. To the area of undergraduate education, SREB has addressed relatively slight programmatic attention. It has worked on indirect indicators such as faculty salaries, on facilitating endeavors such as planning and institutional studies, on a few presumably stimulative conferences for faculty members in academic disciplines. Whatever has actually occurred in the South's development of people and program resources for undergraduate education in the past 20 years, a causative impact by SREB fails to impress this observer.

Institutions and finances for those institutions are also im-

portant resources for higher education. In the 20 years since 1948, some 50 new institutions have been established in the Southern region and many, many more institutions have been expanded dramatically in scope and capacity. SREB, chiefly through its staff, has been in on the decision-making processes which produced a large share of the new state-supported institutions. Its connection with new starts in the private sector has been minimal. With institutional expansions the SREB staff has had less contact. How influential SREB publications and conferences have been in the establishment-expansion process could not be determined, although their pertinence makes them appear to be significant.

SREB has turned out hundreds of thousands of words and statistical entries concerning financial resources for higher education. Concurrently, the amounts of money discovered and made available to public higher education in the respective states have become larger and larger. But co-occurrence does not demonstrate cause-and-effect relationship.

Governors and legislators are openly proud of the advances made by their states in developing money resources for higher education. But they seldom volunteer an opinion that SREB was a potent contributor to such advances. Pressed, however, they do credit SREB events—meetings of the Board, legislative work conferences—as being helpful to them personally. Educators are prone to give even more credit to these events, to the score-keeping and score-distributing enterprises of the SREB staff, and to the barrage of public information on financing higher education emanating from SREB headquarters. The volume of energy and information poured by SREB into the circles where fiscal planning is done certainly cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, comparing the South's development of financial resources for higher education with that in other regions of the nation does not convince the statistical-minded that SREB's existence and activities have made a significant difference. This author is not statistics-bound. He is inclined to credit SREB with a fairly crucial assist.

Influence Upon State Government Actions

Higher education in the South has undergone notable transformations as the result of actions by state government during

the last 20 years. The volume of such actions has been tremendous; the scope comprehended has been equally gargantuan. Comprehensive statewide studies and ensuing legislation, reconstitutions of system structure, development of new mechanisms for legislative appropriations, appropriations themselves, establishment of new varieties of institutions and of new members of old varieties, forays at statewide coordination and continuous master planning, statutory rejuvenations of academic freedom and tenure, desegregation—these constitute only a small sample of matters state governments have acted upon.

For the volume, for the scope, and for the subjects of state action, the Southern Regional Education Board is partially responsible. State after state has called upon staff members of SREB to design and to participate in comprehensive surveys. The SREB office has served repeatedly in connecting a governor, a legislative committee, or a study group with technical advisers and with persons in other states whose experience with a given solution might be helpful to those considering a problem. SREB publications have frequently become authoritative reference works or procedural manuals for legislative committees or citizen study panels. Former governors in impressive number recite particular instances in which they leaned heavily upon the advice of the director of SREB. Numerous citations of similar nature could be added, totaling to a very convincing body of evidence that, in most states, SREB has been not only present but influential in the company of those producing and shaping state action.

In this connection, however, it is wise to stress once more that heavy engagement is no measure of relative strength of influence. The overwhelming proportion of the body of forces accounting for state governance of education in these two decades were neither SREB-connected nor SREB-wielded. Our conclusion is simply that in delineating the total field of force, we must recognize the strategic presence of the Southern Regional Education Board and its staff.

Impact Upon the Content and Practice of Higher Education

One of the persistent rationales for the existence of SREB has

been that of elucidating the indigenous problems and opportunities of the Southern region. Such elucidation, it is argued, will result in adaptations, inventions and focuses in the institutions of higher education designed to cope with what is elucidated. Responses to fact-showing and to challenge-offering might take the form of interinstitutional collaboration. Or it might take the form of new program starts in one or several institutions. Or it could result in single-institution strengthening and/or expansion of some program endeavor already present. These results should add up to significant inroads upon a solution to the problem or toward grasping the opportunity. In short, the long-range impact sought by SREB is upon the content and practice of higher education in the Southern region.

The author's estimate is that 50 percent or more of the efforts marshalled by SREB over the last 20 years have been expanded to make this rationale work. Therefore, one would expect to find a significant proportion of SREB's total impact at the foot of this particular rainbow.

Little doubt can exist that SREB has a magnificent record in elucidating regional manifestations of pervasive societal needs, as well as more particularized conditions in higher education itself. The catalogue of studies and resulting publications is impressive. Those publications have been widely distributed in the South; they have won for SREB unmistakable renown in national circles. The extent to which their content is known to those who shape institutional programs and practices has not been determined, but many of the publications appear upon the shelves of important people. A large proportion of the studies was produced with the advisory direction of firing-line leaders in Southern education, a strategy presumably resulting in wider consumption.

SREB has likewise issued potent challenges to the higher education community. *Within Our Reach* and *The Negro and Higher Education in the South* are two striking, well-known examples. More than a score of others can be identified. In almost every case, extensive attention has been given by news media to the proposals.

From demonstration of needs to recognition with deeds, however, is a long step. In higher education that step is awfully

hard to produce. The staff of SREB has tried valiantly and variably to incite deeds. Even casual perusal of their reports of activities—appearing in the quarterly newsletter, *Regional Action,* and multiple other sources—is bound to impress any historian with the volume of endeavors-toward-deeds. Such perusal certainly excites admiration on the part of this author for the virtuosity, inventiveness and indefatigability of those responsible for the regional program endeavors of SREB. Task forces, study groups, pilot programs, training sessions, high-prestige offerings by top-prestige individuals, brave declarations of criteria, and compilation and issuance of guides to deeds abound in this record. The man-days of labor co-opted from faculty members, administrators in colleges and universities, leading lay citizens, legislators, plus consultants from outside the Southern region are staggering. If any outfit ever worked at being a change agent, at bridging the distance separating needs and deeds, SREB has done so.

But how does one assess the impact of such activities? I asked several people who had been engaged in regional programs what they could see as outcomes. A few cited particular developments on their own campuses which they could trace to a regional program influence. More referred to something they called "additional enthusiasm" or "added insight" they had derived from conferences and committee deliberations. A fairly large number rather ruefully stated they could put their fingers on nothing tangible. A few—professors and directors exclusively—said, "I used SREB leverage to get more attention for my area from the university administration."

Then, there *are* artifacts. Several exist in the mental health services area. One university gives almost sole credit to SREB for its master's degree program in nursing administration. In agricultural sciences and several other fields, special offerings for faculty and students are apparently quite successful. The total number of such traceable artifacts is really quite large and varied, and artifacts-in-the-making currently exist in appreciable numbers. These tangible operations speak positively for SREB's potency.

Reference has been made earlier to the fact that most innovative regional program endeavors of the SREB have tracked

rather closely current emphases running in the national and/or state mainstream of higher education circles. For example, attention to special efforts to overcome cultural disadvantagement of students was widespread and heavily promoted by many agencies, not by SREB alone. For that reason it is impossible to disentangle the innovative impact of SREB forays from the total influence of a complex of change-agents. In most cases the author judges the role of SREB to have been a supplementary, rather than a chief-actor, input. This melding with matters already prominent has led at least some university and college chief administrators to feel that SREB is involving their staff members rather uselessly and unrewardingly in duplicative exercises for the sake of making a show. The status of SREB in the minds of some leaders of higher education in the South, apparently, is still that of being a "they"—an outside agency—rather than a "we"—an agency representing the institutions.

In contrast, those professors, directors, and officials identified with the specialties SREB has undertaken to develop are markedly prone to consider the developmental activities undertaken as stemming from mandates to SREB as a "we" combine. Hence, they expect and seek local-institution response to their findings and recommendations. The result is often what administrators perceive as mounting pressure from outside to affect the distribution of support and attention within the institution: The author cannot say the perception of the administrators is accurate. He can cite several instances in which, apparently, an entente between SREB and a university division has expedited program innovations sought by the division. That is impact, but it may have varieties of results other than program change. Such is the typical lot of change-agents.

When one goes to the complex college or university campus to locate changes in content and practice traceable to the regional program activities of the Southern Regional Education Board, he soon finds he is searching for a needle in a haystack. This is not to say at all that the influence of SREB upon state government actions in higher education has been unfruitful. Faculty salaries are better, faculty preparation levels are upgraded, standards of academic performance have been elevated, morale is perceptibly improved, and the major universities particularly

reflect a sense of being on an upward road. Actions of state government—in which we have said SREB was noticeably influential—are frequently cited as a cause for the improvements noted.

But the investigator is looking for programmatic reflections of SREB's heavy involvement with the promotion of innovations in content and practice. Innovations can be found in impressive abundance. Some are related in nature and substance to SREB emphases, more often tangentially than directly. Many of those familiar with the innovations fail to cite any connection with SREB influence; most are unaware of the promotions undertaken by that agency. On the other hand, for example, of seven men in charge of newly launched offices of institutional studies, four credited SREB with assistance in shaping their endeavors, and almost everyone connected with educational television ventures knew something about SREB's championing of that development.

It is dangerous to generalize, but the author will risk sharing his general impressions. First, campus developments directly attributable to SREB are extremely rare, but this is to pass no judgment upon their strategic character with respect to regional needs. Second, assistance from SREB is extremely hard to establish; the typical academic vagueness about how things come to be thwarts valid conclusions, but one can say quite positively that SREB is unsung in many faculty circles. Third, the number of program developments in which a state coordinating board is reputed to have had a key role is large; maybe some of this influence is derived indirectly from SREB's regional program endeavors. Fourth, SREB is recognized as helpful preponderantly upon major state university campuses; its fan club has relatively few members in the other types of institutions, with the exception of a very few private institutions of considerable prestige. Finally, adding all the program developments together across the region produces a total far short of testimony to a striking revolution. Hence, it is impossible to attribute to SREB, or any other agency, electrifying impact.

Those who know the campus manifestations of change in higher education will not read the foregoing appraisal as an indictment of SREB's regional programs effort. To those who do

not know, it should be pointed out that nothing is more baffling than an answer to how change can be produced in that inertial organism, the institution of higher education. Among the change-agents this author has seen at work trying to demonstrate answers to this question, the batting average of SREB impresses him as being in the upper range.

In Conclusion

To terminate this exploration is difficult because much remains untreated. But it must draw to a conclusion. It does so by quoting excerpts from communications received by the author.

From a former state governor and member of the Board:

The Southern Regional Education Board, in my opinion, has a great influence on education policy in the member states. One reason for this is that the governors have personally participated in conferences with legislators and educators. . . . In the four years I was governor, I saw a change in the attitudes among legislators and governors. . . .

From another former governor:

It would be unrealistic to say I am satisfied with the accomplishments of the Board, but progress has been as rapid as I should have anticipated. An early objective of the Board was that of coordinating graduate programs of two or more institutions in certain fields and, in general, raising the standards. The Board's work in the field of graduate study has made measurable impact. I remember when considering this purpose I made the statement it would probably take 50 years to reach a satisfactory level. In 20 years, we are probably ahead of that schedule.

From a state legislator:

It is my regret that most of the members of legislatures in the 15 states, and even some of the governors, do not fully realize what the potential of SREB actually is. With a few notable exceptions, the staff of the Board has lacked the experience to be fully effective. Nevertheless, I do feel that SREB generally has been of much help in the overall improvement of higher education in the 15 states. In our own case, we can certainly thank the SREB consultants in the junior college field for helping us develop a fine junior college system. . . .

From an officer in a national association for higher education:

My general impression is that SREB has had a very favorable impact on the course of education in the South during the 20 years of its existence. Some of its original reasons for being are now of lesser importance but it has adjusted itself very effectively to changed circumstances, particularly under its recent leadership. In my opinion SREB has been consistently the bellwether among regional compact groups.

From an executive officer of a supervisory state board for higher education:

I am convinced that the work of SREB has been perhaps the most significant factor in the tremendous advances made in higher education in the Southern region. This is mostly because of the character and extent of its involvement with participating state governments. This has given status and invaluable substance to legislative campaigns for financial support.

From a former president of a major state university:

In the beginning the Board had a good effect on education through the contract program and through stimulating thought on the many educational deficiencies which existed in the Southern states. As the years unfolded, new developments by the Board had a decreasing impact on education. It was my feeling when I retired the Board had about reached the limit of its usefulness. . . .

From a long-time state university president and a present member of the Board:

By taking the initiative in recent years in many programs, such as mental health, educational television, and several others, the SREB has supplied substantial and effective leadership where it was badly needed. In this category SREB has become a forceful instrument in interstate programs in journalism education, computer sciences, and education for handicapped children—to cite a few examples. Through its Commission on Goals for Higher Education in the South and its Commission on Higher Educational Opportunity in the South, the SREB has brought together the best thought and leadership in our region, stimulated our thinking, and elevated the hopes and ambitions of our people. In sum, SREB is continuing its helpfulness in improving both the quantity and quality of higher educational opportunities in the South. . . .